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Seal Habitat Under Renovation at Woods Hole Science Aquarium

Construction crews this week began renovations on the seal habitat at the NOAA Fisheries Service Woods Hole Science Aquarium. Work is expected to conclude this winter at an estimated cost of \$750,000. During the renovation, the aquarium expects to remain open its usual winter hours, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The project includes demolition of the 1960s-era seal pool and construction on the same site of a larger, more naturalistic habitat that can provide permanent accommodations for two or three seals. The general contractor for the project is Z Corp, a construction firm based in Norfolk, Virginia.

"The new habitat will provide the seals with more swimming space," said Rachel Metz, senior aquarist at the Aquarium and lead seal handler. "The habitat will be more natural looking, have more places for seals to haul-out, and more variety in water depths," she said.

The project also includes a new life support system that will allow better water quality control as well as specialized husbandry facilities – a kitchen and seal food prep area, and a holding area for seals that are taken off exhibit.

In addition to federal funds, the project is also supported with donations made by the public between 2001 and 2005. The largest of these was granted by the Edward Bangs Kelley and Elza Kelley Foundation in 2002. Thousands of smaller donations were also made by visitors, local residents and businesses.

In the 1990s the Woods Hole Science Aquarium began providing permanent homes for stranded seals that cannot be re-released to the wild after rehabilitation. The renovated seal habitat is scheduled to be completed in time to house seals next summer.

The public aquarium has been part of the federal fisheries laboratory in Woods Hole since 1885, when the first permanent federal laboratory was completed on Water Street. Since 2000, NOAA and the Marine Biological Laboratory have worked to jointly develop programs at the aquarium that increase public interest in, and understanding of, marine science and the marine environment.

Kelley Foundation is a Cape Cod organization that makes grants to support projects that promote the health and welfare of inhabitants of Barnstable County.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

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The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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